NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

TARGETING TERRORIST LEADERS: A CASE STUDY

by

James D. Varden

March 2011

Thesis Advisor: Michael Freeman
Second Reader: Glenn E. Robinson

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE		Form Approved OMB No. 0704—0188

Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instruction, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202—4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704—0188) Washington DC 20503.

1. AGENCY USE ONLY *(Leave blank)*	2. REPORT DATE March 2011	3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED Master's Thesis
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Targeting Terrorist Leaders: A Case Study		**5. FUNDING NUMBERS**
6. AUTHOR(S) James D. Varden		
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, CA 93943—5000		**8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER**
9. SPONSORING /MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) N/A		**10. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER**

11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government. IRB Protocol number _____N/A_____.

12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited	12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE A

13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words)

Targeting terrorist leadership is a common strategy used by governments. The appeal of a quick strike with minimal casualties, combined with the possible swift defeat of the terrorist organization, makes it a very attractive approach. It is important to understand the circumstances under which targeting terrorist leaders will be effective, and the circumstances where such an attack will increase support for the terrorists. This thesis utilizes the Freeman Terrorist Leadership Targeting Model to analyze the effectiveness of Israel's campaign to target Hamas leaders from 1987—2007.

Israel's campaign to target Hamas leaders produced mixed results. Hamas' political influence increased in spite of (and possibly in some degree because of) Israeli operations. However, targeting leadership deprived Hamas of key leaders and contributed to a declining frequency and effectiveness of Hamas suicide attacks.

14. SUBJECT TERMS Leadership targeting, Terrorism, Terrorist Leaders, Terrorist leader targeting, Israel, Occupied Territories, Hamas, Sheikh Yassin	**15. NUMBER OF PAGES** 69
	16. PRICE CODE

17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT Unclassified	**18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE** Unclassified	**19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT** Unclassified	**20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT** UU

NSN 7540—01—280—5500

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 2—89)
Prescribed by ANSI Std. 239—18

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

TARGETING TERRORIST LEADERS: A CASE STUDY

James D. Varden
Lieutenant Colonel, United States Air Force
B.S., University of Arizona, 1993

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN DEFENSE ANALYSIS

from the

NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL
March 2011

Author: James D. Varden

Approved by: Michael Freeman
      Thesis Advisor

      Glenn E. Robinson
      Second Reader

      Gordon McCormick
      Chair, Department of Defense Analysis

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

ABSTRACT

Targeting terrorist leadership is a common strategy used by governments. The appeal of a quick strike with minimal casualties, combined with the possible swift defeat of the terrorist organization, makes it a very attractive approach. It is important to understand the circumstances under which targeting terrorist leaders will be effective, and the circumstances where such an attack will increase support for the terrorists. This thesis utilizes the Freeman Terrorist Leadership Targeting Model to analyze the effectiveness of Israel's campaign to target Hamas leaders from 1987—2007.

Israel's campaign to target Hamas leaders produced mixed results. Hamas' political influence increased in spite of (and possibly in some degree because of) Israeli operations. However, targeting leadership deprived Hamas of key leaders and contributed to a declining frequency and effectiveness of Hamas suicide attacks.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

LIST OF FIGURES

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

I.   INTRODUCTION

A.   PURPOSE

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the effectiveness of Israel's 1987-2007 campaign to arrest and kill Hamas leaders. Using the Freeman Leadership Targeting Model, the goal is to understand whether targeting terror leaders can be an effective strategy. By analyzing a terror leader's charismatic and operational importance, we may be able to predict whether killing or capturing that leader will lead to the group's downfall or inspire further violence.

B.   RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1.   Primary Research Question

The primary question is whether leadership targeting is an effective strategy. There are many negative aspects related to pursuing this strategy, including inspiring retaliatory attacks, generating negative world opinion, and creating martyrs. Therefore, it would be valuable for policymakers to have a model that can help predict whether the attack will be successful and overcome the costs associated with pursuing this strategy.

2.   Secondary Research Questions

The Freeman model analyzes a leader's charismatic and operational importance. However, there are additional factors that can be examined in the Israeli—Palestinian conflict. This thesis also examines attempts to influence Hamas through democracy and economic pressure.

C.   METHODOLOGY

A case study is used to analyze Hamas from 1987 to 2007 and to review the circumstances leading to its creation. Using the framework provided by Freeman, I will examine the importance of several Hamas leaders, including Sheik Ahmed Yassin and Abdel Aziz al-Rantissi, and how their assassinations by Israel in 2004 affected the organization.

D.   POTENTIAL WEAKNESSES

The use of one case to evaluate the efficacy of the terrorist-leadership targeting model is problematic. However, each case study can provide valuable insight into understanding and developing the model. In addition, when combined with other case studies, we gain a greater understanding of the benefits and costs provided by a decapitation strategy.

Using the Freeman model to analyze Hamas is problematic for three reasons. First, the model assumes that leadership is either singular or paired. However, Hamas has many leaders, both inside and outside of the occupied territories. Second, determining the importance of individual leaders within Hamas is difficult. It has been unclear several times who was in charge. In addition, the literature on Hamas is widely split on the role that inspirational leaders had on operational matters. Third, Hamas is — and has always been — more than a terrorist organization. Despite these challenges, the model provides a valuable framework to evaluate the effectiveness of Israeli operations to arrest and kill Hamas leaders.

II. FREEMAN TERRORIST LEADERSHIP TARGETING MODEL

A.   OVERVIEW

Michael Freeman, an assistant professor of defense analysis at the Naval Postgraduate School, is developing a model that studies the effectiveness of targeting terrorist leadership and the resulting impact on terror organizations. He states that "we should not assume that targeting the leaders of terrorist organizations is necessarily an effective strategy."[1] The primary variables he examines are a leader's inspirational and operational leadership abilities. Using these variables, we can begin to explain why some instances of leadership targeting have been effective and others have not.

The central question the model attempts to answer is when leadership targeting will be an effective strategy. An important distinction is made between a *successful* operation to kill or capture a terrorist leader, and whether or not the operation is *effective*. An effective operation has the desired effect on the terrorist organization (i.e., the demise of the group, a reduction in activity). However, successful attacks can be ineffective if they create a martyr or otherwise galvanize terrorists and their supporters.

A decapitation strike — or "leadership targeting" — involves killing or capturing terrorist leaders. In some

---

[1] The current paper being produced by Freeman is unpublished at this time. The document in its entirety, with complete explanation of leadership targeting, will be forthcoming. For the purpose of this paper, the unpublished version is referenced. Changes may exist between the unpublished version being referenced in this paper and the final published version.

cases, the method used may be very important in determining effectiveness. The Peruvian capture of Abimael Guzman – and the broadcast of humiliating images of Guzman in prison garb — is an example of how capturing terrorist leaders may be preferable to killing them.

B. INSPIRATIONAL LEADERSHIP

> For men to plunge headlong into an undertaking of vast change, they must be intensely discontented … and they must have the feeling that by the possession of some potent doctrine, infallible leader or some new technique they have access to a source of irresistible power.[2]

Leaders play a critical role in attracting terrorist recruits. Getting someone to join a terror group and commit acts that society deems illegal and/or immoral requires some motivation. It requires even more incentive for terrorists to risk or sacrifice their lives in conducting attacks. There are several factors that contribute to terrorist sympathizers making the leap to become terrorists. Desperate situations — such as the plight of many Palestinians — are one of the most important. In those situations, the presence of a charismatic leader and a compelling ideology can motivate a sympathizer to cross the line and join a terrorist movement.

The model examines the importance of leaders in developing and promulgating the ideology, and the role of charisma in inspiring individuals to join terror groups and commit terrorist acts. It is assumed that the importance

---

[2] Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer* (New York: Harper and Row, 1951), 11.

of charismatic leaders and their ideology are most critical in the early stages of a terrorist organization.

1. Charisma

For the individual, choosing to take up the armed struggle against the state is a risky proposition. It is better to let others do the fighting, even if you subscribe to the ideology of the group. The presence of a charismatic leader is often the key element that persuades people to put their own lives at risk.

Typically, the charismatic leader develops a following amongst a small group of ideologues who see in the leader as a person with extraordinary gifts. Armed with these gifts, and a following of faithful disciples, the charismatic leader is able to convince others to support and take part in the movement.

Max Weber believed that a desperate situation is a prerequisite to the rise of a charismatic leader.[3] Eric Hoffer agreed:

> [A] leader cannot create the conditions which make the rise of a movement possible. He cannot conjure a movement out of the void. There has to be an eagerness to follow and obey and an intense dissatisfaction with things as they are.[4]

2. Ideology

A terrorist ideology identifies what the problem is, what the solution is, who the enemy is, and what the

---

[3] Michael Freeman, "Leadership Targeting of Terrorist Groups: A Strategic Assessment" (unpublished, Naval Postgraduate School), 15.

[4] Hoffer, *The True Believer,* 111.

legitimate means are.[5] Prior to the founding of Hamas, the main Palestinian resistance groups to Israeli occupation were the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Muslim Brotherhood.   The PLO was secular and militant, while the Muslim Brotherhood was Islamic but wanted to delay the armed struggle. Hamas combined the militancy of the PLO and the religious ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood. To some extent, Yassin and al—Rantissi were critical in shifting the ideology of their core group from within the Muslim Brotherhood.

However, in this case, the situation and historical context had much to do with the creation of the ideology. The ideological development of Hamas was driven more by the circumstances in Palestine than by individual leaders.

Eric Hoffer wrote:

> Hatred is the most accessible and comprehensive of all unifying agents.... Mass movements can rise and spread without belief in a God, but never without belief in a devil. Usually the strength of a mass movement is proportionate to the vividness and tangibility of its devil.[6]

Since Israel was created in 1948, there have been many reasons why Palestinians might view Israel as the enemy: the refugee camps in 1948, Arab humiliations in three wars, armed incursions into Lebanon and the occupied territories, and Israeli bulldozers razing homes in Gaza, to name a few. Yasser Arafat, Sheik Yassin and others were important in advocating the appropriate solution and means; however, the

---

[5] Michael Freeman, class lecture, International Terrorism, spring quarter 2007, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA.

[6] Hoffer, *The True Believer,* 65.

6

problem and the enemy were readily apparent to all Palestinians.

C.   OPERATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Leaders do more than inspire and promote ideology. They also conduct training, plan and execute attacks, and direct others to do the same. The Freeman model considers a leader's importance in three aspects of operational leadership: strategic, tactical and organizational.

1.   Strategic Leadership

Strategic leadership involves decisions on the overall strategy of the organization. Examples in Hamas history include the decision to time the split with the Brotherhood to coincide with the First Intifada, the decision to limit attacks to targeting Israelis and Palestinian collaborators, and the development of Hamas' charter.

2.   Tactical Leadership

Tactical leadership entails directing individual attacks, including choosing the target, the timing of an attack, and which cell members will be used to carry it out. The target can be a result of a strategic decision if it has extraordinary qualities. For example, religious targets in Jerusalem have both strategic and tactical significance. However, many targets are tactical choices such as the particular Israeli checkpoint to target for a suicide bombing.

3. Organizational Leadership

Organizational leadership includes fundraising, recruiting, building alliances, etc. In Hamas' network of social and political organizations, there is a requirement for managing different activities. Fundraising for Hamas occurs around the world, particularly in Europe, America and the Middle East. In addition, Hamas has worked with Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad and even Fatah in the past when they shared common goals. The requirements in leading this vast array of tasks requires some measure of decentralization of power within Hamas. The model assumes that the more power held by the leader, the more vulnerable Hamas would be to leadership decapitation.

D. CONCEPTIONAL MODEL

The model rates a leader's operational importance on the X—axis and the inspirational importance on the Y—axis (see Figure 1). As previously mentioned, the operational variable includes strategic, tactical and organizational components. The inspirational variable includes charismatic and ideological components. Presumably, most terrorist groups begin in the upper right of the graph, where leaders are most important.

The model assumes that for the terrorist group to be successful, it must grow. A small group in Quadrant I would be incapable of ending Israeli occupation, much less the destruction of Israel. Therefore, nascent terror groups must recruit and grow beyond the capabilities of the initial cadre.[7]

---

[7] Freeman, "Leadership Targeting," 28.

If a terrorist group grows successfully over time, the importance of the individual leaders usually diminishes in relation to the overall organization. There are different paths leaders will take as they become less critical; some will retain their inspirational importance ("Persistent Leaders"), while others will retain their operational roles ("Fleeting Leaders"). The curves in Figure 1 represent two possible pathways. The leader that goes from Quadrant I to II, then IV, retains more importance in inspirational matters. In contrast, operationally oriented leaders will go from Quadrant I to III, then to Quadrant IV. These are two of the most likely pathways. However, any path in between is possible, and it is feasible for an individual leader to grow in one — or both — of the variables. These leaders are called "Neo-Visionary" and "Resurgent" leaders.

Freeman concludes that leaders in Quadrant I – the most important in both variables – are the best targets for single decapitation attacks. In contrast, Quadrant IV organizations may be immune to leadership targeting because no leader is critical either inspirationally or organizationally. Finally, he theorizes that targeting inspirational leaders in Quadrant II should be more successful than targeting operational leaders in Quadrant III. The reason is that inspirational and charismatic leaders are harder to replace than skilled organizing leaders.

The Value of Individual Leaders

Inspirational

Multiple/Synch   Decap

II

Single   Decap

I

Neo Visionary Leader

Persistent Leader

Resurgent Leader
Declining Leader

Fleeting Leader

Re-Organizing Leader

No Decap

IV

Sustained   Decap

III

Operational
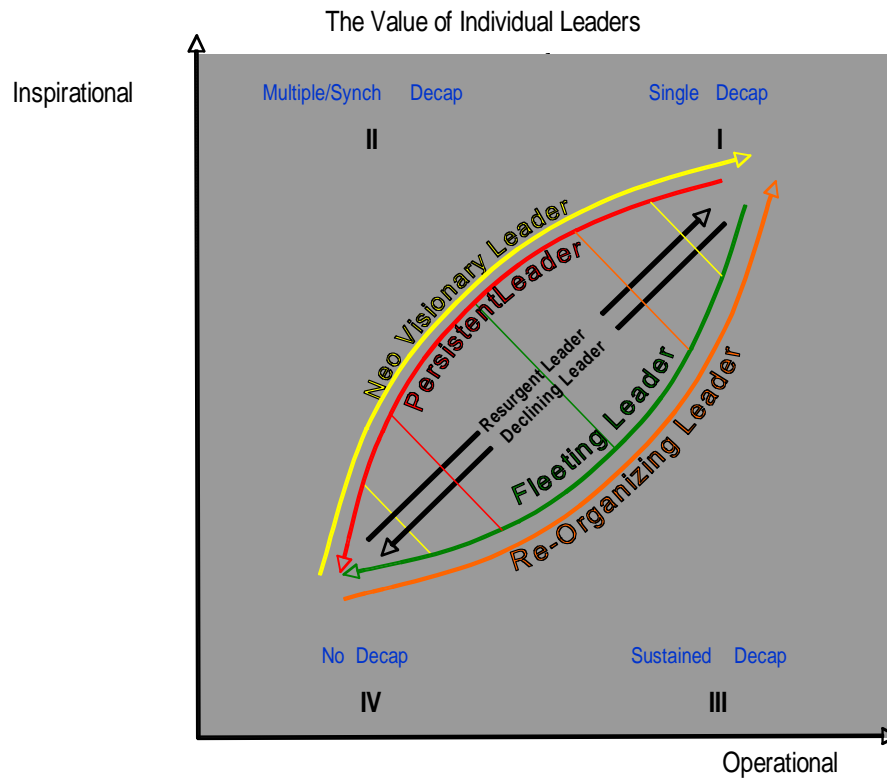
Figure 1.   Freeman Leadership Model (From: Freeman, unpublished)

III. HAMAS CASE STUDY

A. HISTORY OF HAMAS

Hamas was officially founded in 1987, during the First Intifada by Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, Al-Abdel Azia al-Rantissi, and five others. However, the organization's roots go back much further. According to Hamas' own semi-official history, the group began organizing in 1967 among hard—core members of the Muslim Brotherhood in Gaza.

The Muslim Brotherhood in Gaza — and the future leaders of Hamas — focused on spiritual and social programs from 1967 until the early 1980s, with the goal of revitalizing Islam in Palestine. Its objective was to resist the Israeli occupation but believed it first needed to rebuild the Islamic faith of the people. Subsequently, it established Islamic schools, mosques and other social institutions in Gaza and the West Bank. These efforts, combined with a rise of Islamic reform movements throughout the Arab world, led to a dramatic rise in Islam in the occupied territories. For example, from 1967 to 1987, the number of mosques in Gaza increased from 200 to 600 and from 450 to 700 in the West Bank.[8]

As economic conditions continued to deteriorate in Gaza, pressure built within the Islamic community to get involved in protests and more forcibly resist the Israeli occupation. The pressure on the Brotherhood leadership — or Ikhwan — increased further when the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) was founded in the late 1970s by Fathi al-

---

[8] Zaki Chehab, *Inside Hamas* (New York: Nation Books, 2007), 145.

Shiqaqi. The creation of PIJ gave frustrated Palestinians an Islamic alternative to the PLO. When Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982, additional strain was placed on the Ikhwan to become more militant.[9]

Ultimately, some leaders felt the Muslim Brotherhood was unable to "withstand the pressure from within their own ranks"[10] to become more aggressive in protesting the Israeli occupation. Discontent among young Islamic supporters of the Palestinian Brotherhood leadership grew, and some members defected to the PIJ.[11] "As time passed, the position of the Ikhwan, which continued to discourage participation in any form of protest activities, became indefensible."[12]

Consequently, in 1982, Sheikh Yassin and other Ikhwan leaders decided to "supplement the Muslim Brotherhood's radical Islamic ideology with Palestinian national overtones,"[13] and prepare for an armed resistance. This was followed by a meeting in 1983 of Palestinian Brotherhood leaders in Amman that laid the groundwork for cooperation in Gaza, the West Bank and outside Palestine.[14] Efforts to raise money and accumulate weapons began, and in 1985, a special body known as the "Jihaz" was set up in Jordan to

---

[9] Azzam Tamimi, *Hamas: A History from Within* (Northampton: Olive Branch Press, 2007) 42.

[10] Tamimi, *Hamas: A History from Within,* 44.

[11] International Crisis Group, "Dealing with Hamas," www.crisisgroup.org, 6.

[12] Tamimi, *Hamas: A History from Within,* 48.

[13] Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center at the Center for Special Studies, "Profile of the Hamas Movement," intelligence.org.il.

[14] Tamimi, *Hamas: A History from Within,* 45.

provide logistical support for the organization. Finally, in 1986, the Ikhwan decided to encourage followers to participate in protests.

When the First Intifada erupted on December 8, 1987, "[t]he Ikhwan had no option except to seize the occasion."[15] The next day, the Ikhwan decided the time was right to begin open resistance to Israeli occupation, and on December 14, it issued a press release announcing the birth of Hamas.

Hamas initially advocated less violent resistance, including protests, general strikes and boycotting Israeli goods. However, it gradually escalated the means of resistance while fostering the radicalization of society. One tactic used was transforming the "martyrs" of the First Intifada into local heroes. Hamas accomplished this by publishing leaflets that glorified the martyrs. This approach may have influenced young Gazans and subsequently helped Hamas recruit suicide bombers.[16]

Ironically, the Israeli government initially tolerated Hamas because it was an alternative to the PLO and PIJ. This initial tolerance is not surprising given the Brotherhood's history of social programs in the occupied territories. As a result, Hamas was able to organize their social organizations on the surface while simultaneously building an underground network without interference from Israeli security forces.

---

[15]   Tamimi, *Hamas: A History from Within,* 52.

[16]   Youssef Abdou-Enein, "Hamas: A Further Exploration of Jihadist Tactics," *Strategic Insights IV* (2005).

However, by August 1988, Israel began to arrest Hamas leaders and activists. The first round of arrests included over 120 senior members of Hamas, "including all the founding members of Hamas apart from Sheikh Yassin."[17] Although the Israelis knew about Yassin, they allowed him to remain free so they could learn more about Hamas. As a result of this round of arrests, Hamas set up a shadow leadership outside Palestine. This shadow leadership reduced the risk posed by future roundups to the organization.

In 1989, this shadow leadership was put to the test during a second round of mass arrests. This round of arrests included Sheikh Yassin, and was triggered by the kidnapping and killing of two Israeli soldiers. The Jihaz — safely located outside of Palestine — was able to assume leadership inside Gaza. Annual mass arrests during 1990–1992 saw the same pattern repeat itself: "[w]ith a new and more resilient structure in place, and with a seemingly inexhaustible supply of recruits, Hamas was able easily to recover after every apparently terminal blow."[18]

During these early years, Hamas used its ties to the Muslim Brotherhood and their social activities to gain the legitimacy and support of the Palestinian people. In addition, they earned support due to the fact they were finally resisting the occupation. For individual Palestinians, the alternatives to Hamas did not have either an Islamic background (PLO), or provide the social services (PIJ) that Hamas had cultivated for two decades.

---

[17] Tamimi, *Hamas: A History from Within,* 56.

[18] Tamimi, *Hamas: A History from Within,* 61.

Initially, the primary targets of Hamas attacks were Palestinians collaborating with Israel. The first attack on an Israeli civilian by Hamas came in December 1991, and was followed by the first suicide bombing in 1994.[19] Hamas claimed that the purpose of every attack on Israelis was to retaliate for Israeli attacks on Palestinians. At various times Hamas used attacks to gain popular support, derail the peace process and to weaken its rivals.[20]

In December 1992, a Hamas cell kidnapped Israeli Sergeant—Major Nissim Toledano. They subsequently demanded the release of Sheik Yassin, who had been arrested during the second round of mass arrests in 1989. Yassin's jailers put him on TV hoping that he would convince Hamas to release the hostages. This allowed Yassin to appeal to the Israeli public for the first time and resulted in a "publicity bonanza" for Hamas.[21] Yassin advised the cell against killing Toledano, in order to give the Israelis time to meet the cell's demand to release him. However, Toledano was later executed and on December 16, 2002, Israel began another round of mass arrests. More than 2000 activists were detained, including 415 Hamas and PIJ leaders. Subsequently, Israel attempted to deport these activists to Lebanon.

At the border, the Lebanese army prevented the deportees from entering Lebanon. They were forced to create a makeshift refugee camp where they remained for

---

[19] Charles Enderlin, "Understanding the Factional Violence in Palestine," speech given in Washington, D.C. (2006). Available at www.mideast1.org.

[20] Enderlin, "Understanding Factional Violence," www.mideast1.org.

[21] Tamimi, *Hamas: A History from Within,* 64.

eight months. During those months, the refugees were led by al—Rantissi, one of Hamas' founders. Hamas and PIJ took advantage of the camp to cement connections between West Bank and Gaza leaders, and to forge cross faction ties. In addition, the refugees conducted military training with Hezbollah that improved Hamas' capability when they returned to the occupied territories.[22] The existence of the camp increasingly became a problem for Israel. Consequently, Israel allowed half of the refugees to return to Palestine after eight months in the camp, and the rest followed within two weeks.[23]

Hamas did not falter with Yassin in prison and al—Rantissi deported. As Tamimi writes,

> After each mass detention or mass deportation campaign a leadership vacuum ensued and the Hamas movement was severely shaken. But this only happened momentarily: on each occasion the inevitable outcome was the ascent of a new generation of leaders.[24]

Only five years since their creation in 1987, Hamas was horizontally decentralized with leadership entrenched in Gaza, the West Bank, Kuwait and Jordan.

During the next few years, Hamas continued to conduct attacks "in response" to Israeli aggression. In addition, Hamas continued to expand its network of social programs and increase its popular support.

In 1993, the Oslo Accords were signed between the PLO and Israel. The Accords were intended to provide a

---

[22] International Crisis Group, "Dealing with Hamas," 8.

[23] Tamimi, *Hamas: A History from Within,* 70.

[24] Tamimi, *Hamas: A History from Within,* 68.

framework to resolve major hurdles in the conflict within five years (Israeli settlements, border security, Palestinian refugees, etc.).   To many Palestinians, the perceived failure of the agreement over the ensuing five years validated Hamas' approach of resistance, in contrast to the failed use of negotiation by the PLO.

On January 5, 1996, Israel assassinated Yahya Ayyash, Hamas' chief bomb maker. This assassination provoked Hamas to retaliate with four bus bombings. However, Ayyash's death and Israeli operations against other Hamas bomb makers led to a decrease in the effectiveness of Hamas attacks for several years.[25]

The Second Intifada, which began in September 2000, saw a dramatic increase in the pace of attacks by Hamas, PIJ, and other groups. In the seven-and-a-half years prior to September 2000, Hamas conducted 27 attacks. During the next four years, Hamas conducted 112 attacks that resulted in 474 deaths.[26] Hamas was not alone in escalating the pace of attacks. Although Hamas was only responsible for 40% of all attacks during the Second Intifada, it was the "leading perpetrator of suicide bombing[s]."[27] This escalation of violence influenced Israel to resume targeting Hamas leaders more heavily.

In 2003, Hamas began to recruit and train a standing militia in Gaza. These troops were distinct from the

---

[25] "Hamas," www.wikipedia.org, Dec 07.

[26] Ali Wyne, "Suicide Terrorism as Strategy: Case Studies of Hamas and the Kurdistan Workers Party," *Strategic Insights IV:7 (2005)*, www.ccc.nps.navy.mil.

[27] Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, "Profile of the Hamas Movement," intelligence.org.il.

terrorist arm of Hamas, known as the al—Qassam Brigades. In 2004, Hamas also scored several political victories in local elections. By this time, Hamas was established firmly in the West Bank and Gaza, maintained offices in Syria, raised money throughout the world, had a standing militia and had won local political victories. Although Yassin and al—Rantissi were both killed by Israeli attacks in early 2004, Hamas continued to operate and increase its popular support at the expense of the Palestinian Authority (PA). At this time, Hamas was clearly beyond the point where a decapitation strike would cripple the organization.

Prior to 2006, Hamas had an estimated $70M annual budget. Most of these funds went to social programs, including schools, orphanages, health clinics, mosques, charities.[28]

In January 2006, Hamas won the majority of seats in the Palestinian government. They gained 74 of 132 seats in the Palestinian parliament with 42.9% of the vote. To some degree, this was a protest vote against the corruption of the PA and its inability to provide for the social needs of the people.[29] In addition, economic conditions in Gaza and the West Bank were deplorable. These facts, combined with shrewd campaigning and the popularity of Hamas' social programs, brought the group to power. U.S. Ambassador Dennis Ross wrote:

> Support for Hamas has grown out of frustration
> and anger and the ability of the organization to
> fill a vacuum of leadership. If there is a

---

[28] "Hamas," www.wikipedia.org, Dec 07.

[29] Matthew Levitt, *Hamas: Politics, Charity, and Terrorism in the Service of Jihad* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 30.

secular alternative that is credible, most Palestinians would support it, particularly because Palestinian society remains far more secular than religiously devout.[30]

B.   HAMAS IDEOLOGY

> The Islamic Resistance Movement…strives to raise the banner of Allah over every inch of Palestine.
> – Article 6, The Covenant of Hamas

> The Islamic Resistance Movement believes that the land of Palestine is an Islamic Waqf consecrated for future Muslim generations until Judgment Day. It, or any part of it, should not be squandered: it, or any part of it, should not be given up.
> – Article 11

Hamas was formed by members of the Muslim Brotherhood in Gaza and shares much of its ideology. This includes the desire to reverse the secularization of society and perceived decline in Islamic faith. The Muslim Brotherhood (MB) believed "that the Muslim nation (ummah) must first be brought back to the true path of Islam before it can engage in a violent jihad."[31] Hamas departed from the MB and other Palestinian groups by combining Islam, nationalism, and militancy with an extensive social and political activism.[32]

Conditions in the occupied territories (occupation, recession, etc.) were critical to the ideological development of the Muslim Brotherhood in Gaza and the subsequent transition to a revolutionary ideology. Supporting factors included the rise of competing resistance movements (most notably the PLO and the PIJ), and the success of revolutionary Islam in Iran.

---

[30] Levitt, *Hamas*, ix.

[31] Levitt, *Hamas*, 30.

[32] Levitt, *Hamas*, 16.

To some degree, Yassin and other Hamas co—founders were responsible for the ideological switch of means and the embracing of armed resistance. However, it appears the shift in ideology came partly as a result of pressure from young leaders within the organization who wanted a more militant approach. The shift was also in response to the threat of losing influence to the PLO and PIJ, who took more aggressive measures that were popular with many Palestinians.

Hamas' charter was written in 1988, a year after the organization was founded. The author is believed to be Abd al—Fattah Dukhan, one of the seven founders who often acted as Hamas' second in command to Yassin. It stated that the problem was the Zionist occupation of Palestine, the enemy was Israel, and the solution was a violent jihad. The extremist language in the charter was most likely intended to appeal to Palestinians frustrated with PLO concessions to Israel.[33]

The legitimate means of fighting the jihad has grown since inception. Prior to 1994, there was a slow escalation of means beginning with protests, then intensified violence — including clashes with police and kidnappings. This escalation culminated in 1994, when Hamas conducted its first car and suicide bombings.

Hamas justifies the use of suicide bombings in two ways. First, it claims that each attack is in response to specific Palestinian civilian casualties caused by Israeli actions. Second, it claims that Israel is a militarized society; therefore, attacking Israeli civilians is

---

[33] Tamimi, *Hamas: A History from Within,* 151.

acceptable.   Hamas believes that the use of suicide bombings is effective in resisting the occupation and in generating support for the movement.   However, Hamas restricts attacks when they are less popular with the Palestinian people.[34]

Hamas opposes the "two—state" solution, and its charter calls for the liberation of all of Palestine.   As a result, it has been against the peace process, and often has stepped up attacks during peace negotiations.   Hamas claims to be a national liberation movement and gains some measure of support from secular Palestinians who believe Hamas has the best approach in dealing with Israel.[35]

The significance of Hamas' charter and relevance to current ideology is debatable.   According to Tamimi, "Hamas leaders of today…are increasingly convinced that the Charter as a whole has been more of a hindrance than a help."[36]   There are numerous examples of Hamas hinting that it would accept a two—state solution if Israel returned to the pre—1967 borders, and allowed for the right of return.

Since the 2006 election, there have been mixed signals from Hamas leaders that a two—state solution was possible. The election platform called for an independent state and omitted any call for destroying Israel.   Khaled Mashal stated in February of 2006 that the charter remained in force, which called for the destruction of Israel.   Five days later, he said that Hamas would end violence if Israel

---

[34]   Wyne, "Suicide Terrorism as Strategy," 3.

[35]   International Crisis Group, "Dealing with Hamas," 17.

[36]   Tamimi, *Hamas: A History from Within,* 148.

returned to the 1967 borders.[37] Other Hamas leaders stated that the charter remained in force.

The clearest departure from the charter came in April 2006, when Hamas' foreign minister Mahmoud al—Zahar said in a letter to United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan that a Hamas government would accept a two—state solution.[38] Three months earlier, Khaled Mashal said that existing Palestinian agreements with Israel would be upheld.[39] The disparity in comments from Hamas is likely due to the need to appeal to both moderates and extremists within its organization and to its external supporters.

To date, Hamas has been focused on the "near" enemy (Israel), although there have been debates on the issue within Hamas leadership. In November 2006, Hamas' military wing called for Muslims around world to attack American targets. However, no attack outside Israel/Palestine has been attributed to Hamas.[40] Two motivations for Hamas to remain focused on the near enemy are first, that much of its internal support comes from nationalists focused on Israel, and second, that much of its external support comes from donors in Europe and America.

In the past, when Hamas factions called for attacks on the "far" enemy, it was over-ruled by leadership. However, there are several scenarios that could influence Hamas to target the far enemy. First, frustration associated with

---

[37] "Hamas," www.wikipedia.org, accessed Dec 07.

[38] Khaled Hroub, *Hamas: A Beginner's Guide (London: Pluto Press),* 40.

[39] Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, "Profile of the Hamas Movement," 8.

[40] "Hamas," www.wikipedia.org, accessed Dec 07.

continued failure to gain concessions from Israel may cause these leaders to change tactics. Second, if Hamas continues to have difficulty governing Gaza, leaders may be encouraged to try a more drastic approach. Third, as Hamas has grown, the possibility of unsanctioned operations has increased.

The Israeli practice of targeting Hamas leaders may incidentally contribute to a faction acting on its own against the West. To this point, Hamas' political leaders have, for the most part, been in firm control of the military wing of Hamas. However, as a result of leadership targeting and mass arrests, power within Hamas has been horizontally distributed, and this will make it a constant challenge for its leaders to enforce a coherent strategy.

Hamas views its religious and social programs as the most important tools for recruiting and undermining Israel and the PA.[41] Economic conditions in Palestine were fertile ground for the development of an alternative ideology to the secular PA. For example, in 2003 the unemployment rate was 33.5%, and approximately 75% of the population lived below the poverty line.[42] Dr. Matthew Levitt argues that Hamas has sought to undermine PA efforts to improve the economy in order to reduce support for the PA.

After winning the election in 2006, Hamas has faced challenges that could alter its ideology. According to Khaled Hroub, Hamas' election victory led to increased focus on short- and medium-term goals associated with governance. He further speculated, "the longer Hamas

---

[41] Levitt, *Hamas*, 32.

[42] Levitt, *Hamas*, 6.

remains in power, the more tensions will appear between its religious and nationalist constituents, with the probable pragmatic outcome pushing the movement to a more politicized nationalist leaning."[43]

C. HAMAS LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE

The development of Hamas' organization and ideology were well advanced when it was formed in 1987 and not dependent upon individual leaders. Rather, Hamas was loosely structured and relied "heavily on group leadership."[44] The executive body is known as the Political Committee or Shura Council. It has 12—14 members, and includes inside and outside leaders. For decision making, Hamas "operates through extensive and often time—consuming consultation…before reaching a consensus." There is also a Gaza Steering Committee, some members of which serve on the Shura Council as well. In some cases involving local issues, the Steering Committee will act autonomously.[45]

In addition, the literature reviewed does not show evidence of a strict hierarchical structure within Hamas. Rather, it appears as though Yassin had more influence in debates than the other co—founders, but was not more powerful in any formal way. Yassin provided some insight into Hamas decision making in a letter to fellow leaders:

> These ideas I am sending to you should be studied and analyzed in the Shura Council of the movement in order that we can make collective decisions….it is not permissible for any one person or a group to take a decision which would

---

[43] Hroub, *Hamas: A Beginner's Guide,* 30.

[44] International Crisis Group, "Dealing with Hamas," 10.

[45] International Crisis Group, "Dealing with Hamas," 10-11.

affect the future and decide the fate of our movement. Any decision taken by the majority, should be obeyed whatever it may be.[46]

Hamas claims to have separate political, military and social wings of the organization. However, this claim is "fundamentally untrue,"[47] as Hamas political leaders traditionally were directly involved in operations, including recruiting, fund raising and commanding attacks. In addition, Hamas uses its network of social organizations to indoctrinate and recruit terrorists, provide jobs to operatives, and provide logistical support for attacks.[48] Therefore, at least until the election in 2006, there is no clear distinction between operational and spiritual leaders. Rather Yassin, al—Rantissi and other leaders were likely somewhat responsible for terrorist operations, in addition to their involvement in social and inspirational programs.

D.   ISRAELI OPERATIONS TARGETING HAMAS LEADERS

Israel has attempted to kill or capture Hamas leaders on many occasions. Israeli strategy "focused on removing the influential and charismatic leaders needed to hold the movement together."[49] This section examines seven major operations, beginning with the first round of mass arrests in 1988, and culminating in the killings of Sheikh Yassin and al—Rantissi in 2004.

---

[46]   Zaki Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, 112-113.

[47]   Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, "Profile of the Hamas Movement," 21.

[48]   Levitt, *Hamas*, 2.

[49]   Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, 69.

1.   1988: Mass Arrests

Israel's first serious move against Hamas occurred in 1988. At the onset of the First Intifada, Israel supported Hamas as a counter to the PLO and PIJ. However, as the Intifada progressed, Hamas became more militant, which eventually resulted in a round of mass arrests of Hamas leaders in September 1988.

Although many key leaders were arrested, Hamas survived for several reasons, including its informal organization and leadership depth from its Muslim Brotherhood background. In addition, the communal nature of leadership meant that all key leaders would have to be arrested to result in a leadership void. However, Yassin was not arrested and his importance continued to grow. This informal and communal leadership structure arose from cultural norms. In addition, the Ikhwan was influenced by experience with Egyptian attempts to arrest leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood. As a result, Hamas was organized more as a network of community leaders as opposed to a hierarchy vulnerable to decapitation.

Despite these measures, Hamas was impacted by the September 1988 detentions. The arrests prompted a "greater fragmentation" of Hamas' hierarchy.[50] In addition, Sheikh Yassin emerged as the unquestioned leader of Hamas despite the lack of a formal leadership structure.[51] A final

---

[50]   Shaul Mishal and Avraham Sela, *The Palestinian Hamas* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 57.

[51]   Mishal and Sela, *The Palestinian Hamas*, xix.

outcome of this first round of arrests was that Hamas organized a group of leaders outside of Palestine who could fill any future leadership void.

2. 1989: Mass Arrests

Although Hamas leadership was fragmented by the 1988 arrests, the organization's popularity continued to grow. Its growing militancy prompted Israel to stage a second round of arrests in May 1989. The result decimated Hamas leadership; over 1500 leaders and activists were arrested, including Sheik Yassin. Yassin, who was possibly at the pinnacle of his operational and inspirational importance, was among those detained. The sheikh's importance tumbled dramatically, and his "status as the one supreme authority came to an end."[52] According to Azzam Tamimi, "[t]he mass detentions decapitated Hamas: all of its first— and second— ranking officials were detained. The Israeli campaign almost succeeded in annihilating the movement."[53]

Whereas the first round of arrests led to the creation of the "outside" leadership, the second round revolutionized Hamas. The "outside" leaders took over Hamas and created a formal structure that emphasized "the supremacy of the outside" leadership.[54] The existence of this outside leadership would later give Hamas the ability to survive subsequent attempts at decapitation. As Tamimi writes, the "presence of senior Hamas leaders outside

---

[52] Mishal and Sela, *The Palestinian Hamas*, 58.

[53] Tamimi, *Hamas: A History from Within,* 59.

[54] Mishal and Sela, *The Palestinian Hamas*, 59.

Palestine shielded the movement not only against potentially fatal measures on the part of the Israelis, but also against moves by the PLO."[55]

Redundant internal and external leadership, combined with the communal nature of Hamas decision making diminished the importance of individual leaders. Despite this, support for Hamas grew as its militancy increased. Also, Hamas gained prestige as a result of surviving repeated Israeli efforts to stop them.

3.   1992: Mass Deportation

Faced with an increasingly dangerous threat, Israel attempted a third massive operation at crippling Hamas and the PIJ when it deported 415 leaders of these movements on December 17, 1992. The deportation occurred after six Israeli security forces members were killed during the first two weeks of December.[56] Once again, Hamas survived this attack because of the existence of the outside leadership. In fact, the deportation backfired when Lebanon refused to accept them and the subsequent plight of the "refugees" garnered international sympathy.

In addition, deported Hamas and PIJ leaders — led by al—Rantissi — connected with Hezbollah leaders and learned from their experience fighting Israel. As a result, Hamas improved their bomb-making skills and adapted a drastic change in tactics. To this point, Hamas had not used suicide attacks as a means of fighting the Israelis.

---

[55] Tamimi, *Hamas: A History from Within,* 61.

[56] The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, "The Mass Deportation of 1992," www.btselem.org.

However, less than a year after the refugees returned in 1993, Hamas conducted its first suicide bombing.

4.   1996: Yahya Ayyash Killed

After three unsuccessful attempts to decapitate Hamas through mass arrests and deportations, Israel's next attempt to diminish Hamas' effectiveness was a targeted killing. After the deportees returned, Hamas increased the pace and effectiveness of their attacks. As Hamas bomb-making skills grew, the attacks became more spectacular. This led to the Israeli decision to kill Yahya Ayyash, aka the "Engineer," Hamas' chief bomb maker. Israel infiltrated the organization and planted a cell phone for Ayyash loaded with explosives; Ayyash was killed January 5, 1996. In the aftermath, Hamas conducted at least four attacks in retaliation for the Ayyash's death.

Although the killing of Ayyash resulted in a short-term increase in violence, the pace and effectiveness of Hamas bombing operations subsequently declined. Ayyash was not an inspirational leader, but he was a technical expert and thus important to Hamas' operations. His killing is an example of effectively targeting a Quadrant IV leader with key operational expertise.

5.   1997: Attempt to Kill Khaled Mashal

Israel's fifth leadership targeting operation attempted to replicate the success of killing Ayyash, as well as strike a blow to the outside leadership. The target was Khaled Mashal — head of Hamas' outside leadership who lived in Jordan.

As head of the "outside" leadership, Khaled Mashal was a Quadrant III leader. His importance in operational matters was derived from his strategic and organizational leadership, including building support in Arab nations and controlling the flow of resources into Hamas' social and terrorist activities. He was not a critical inspirational leader. That role continued to fall primarily to Yassin (despite his imprisonment) and local leaders in the occupied territories.

On September 25, 1997, the Israeli attempt to poison Mashal failed, and two Mossad agents were captured by Jordanian authorities. In the aftermath, Israel released Sheikh Yassin in exchange for the Mossad agents.

Yassin's release led to a resurgence of his role in Hamas' operational leadership, and shifted "Hamas's center of gravity" back to the inside leadership.[57] He transitioned to a Quadrant I leader until his death in 2004. Ultimately, the outside leadership was still in control of the Hamas, but Yassin's inspirational leadership made him the key leader in the occupied territories.

6.   2004: Sheikh Yassin Killed

Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, one of the founders of Hamas and its spiritual leader, was targeted by Israel three times. He was arrested in 1984 and imprisoned for a year. He was arrested again in 1989 and stayed in prison until 1997. As Yassin went in and out of prison, his operational importance waxed and waned, but he remained the most important inspirational figure in Hamas until Israel

---

[57] Mishal and Sela, *The Palestinian Hamas*, 111-112.

targeted him for the final time in 2004. On March 22, 2004, Yassin was killed by an Israeli helicopter strike in response to continued terrorist attacks.

Ahmed Yassin was born in 1936, in an area north of Gaza that was part of the British mandate. In 1948, his family moved to the Gaza refugee camps. At age 16, Yassin was paralyzed after an accident playing on the beach, and he was confined to a wheelchair for the rest of his life. Yassin joined the Muslim Brotherhood while in college at al—Azhar University in Cairo.

After returning from Cairo, Yassin became well known as a "teacher and spiritual leader" in Gaza's Islamic community. He gained a following through teaching and public lectures — particularly among high school students.[58] His weekly sermons drew large crowds, and he gained influence by delivering sermons at multiple mosques in Gaza[59]. After a Nasserist purge of Gaza members of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1965, Yassin called ten Ikhwan leaders together to discuss relaunching the Brotherhood in Palestine.[60]

During the early stages of the Israeli occupation, Yassin "focused primarily on instilling Islamic values and ethics in the hearts and minds of the young. Unlike the former Nasser administration in Gaza, the Israeli occupation authorities did not object to this seemingly benign religious activity."[61] In 1973, he founded the al—

---

[58] Tamimi, *Hamas: A History from Within,* 21.

[59] Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, 16-18.

[60] Tamimi, *Hamas: A History from Within,* 20.

[61] Tamimi, *Hamas: A History from Within,* 21.

Mujama al—Islamiya – or Islamic Center. This was the genesis of the network of social organizations Hamas would run, which has grown to include health clinics, orphanages, sports leagues, summer camps, schools and mosques.[62]

During this period, Yassin was particularly influential. His lectures and teachings were important in developing the future social programs and ideology that would form the basis for launching Hamas in 1987. He helped revive the Islamic community after the Nasser regime's campaign against the Brotherhood, and helped the Ikhwan's ideology compete with the secular PLO.

As pressure on the Ikhwan to participate in resisting Israeli occupation grew during the late 1970s and early 1980s, Yassin advocated concentrating on reform within the Islamic community. He would later state, "I had a personal desire, and I was motivated, to launch the battle as early as 1967. However, whenever we studied the circumstances and assessed the resources we found them insufficient and had to postpone."[63] The pressure from within the Islamic community continued to grow in 1979 following the Iranian Revolution and the war in Afghanistan. In addition, the popularity of the PLO and PIJ were growing as they actively protested and/or combated the occupation.

Yassin was one of the key leaders who decided in 1982—1983 to make the transformation to an armed resistance. Under his guidance, the Ikhwan began to prepare logistically for the eventual launch of Hamas. In 1984,

---

[62] Levitt, *Hamas,* 34.

[63] Tamimi, *Hamas: A History from Within,* 34.

Yassin was arrested by Israel for his part in directing an operation to stockpile weapons. He was released a year later in a prisoner exchange.[64]

When the First Intifada began in December 1987, Yassin was one of the seven co—founders of Hamas. The meeting that culminated with the decision to launch Hamas was held at Yassin's house.[65] From the beginning, he was directly involved in operational decisions including the recruitment and direction of individual cells.[66] However, the existence of six other co—founders limited his influence.

After Yassin was arrested the second time in 1989, his operational importance to Hamas plummeted. However, his trial was televised live by Israel, and he maintained some inspirational importance.[67] This was apparent by demands from Hamas to release him throughout his imprisonment.[68] In addition, Israel considered releasing Yassin when his health started to deteriorate in prison. The concern was that if Yassin died in prison it would increase support for Hamas.

Yassin was eventually released in 1997 after the botched Mossad attempt to poison Khaled Mashal in Amman. King Hussein demanded that Israel provide the antidote and free Yassin in exchange for two Mossad agents who were captured in the operation.

---

[64] Tamimi, *Hamas: A History from Within,* 46.

[65] Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, 25.

[66] Levitt, *Hamas*, 39.

[67] Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, 34.

[68] Tamimi, *Hamas: A History from Within,* 100.

At various times during his imprisonment, Israel, Jordan and the PLO all attempted to drive wedges between Hamas' leadership in and outside of Palestine. Yassin's release put an end to these efforts and united Hamas.[69]

After his release, Yassin was not allowed back into Gaza for four months. During this time, he toured Gulf nations where he found a great deal of support from Arab leaders frustrated with Israeli actions in the occupied territories. Yassin's tour provided a financial windfall for Hamas. Upon his return to Gaza, he "found that he was widely regarded no longer as merely the leader of Hamas but also the symbol of resistance and defiance for millions of Palestinians who felt betrayed by the PLO leadership."[70] He resumed his position within Hamas and increasingly exerted operational control until his assassination in 2004.

However, Yassin's power within Hamas was far from absolute. The primacy of the outside leadership was maintained. According to the International Crisis Group, Yassin's "policy statements derive[d] their authority from their ability to formulate consensus positions at the conclusion of internal discussions."[71]

An incident in 1999 demonstrated the unique relationship between the inside and outside leadership in Hamas. Yasser Arafat invited Yassin to the PLO Central Council meeting in Gaza in late 1999. Yassin attended despite the objections of the outside leadership. Subsequently, the outside leadership's Political Bureau

---

[69] Tamimi, *Hamas: A History from Within,* 112.

[70] Tamimi, *Hamas: A History from Within,* 111.

[71] International Crisis Group, "Dealing with Hamas," 10.

issued a statement saying that Yassin was not representing Hamas. In response, Yassin left the meetings. As Levitt writes, "Sheikh Yassin's eventual compliance with the Hamas leadership's decision on this matter represented a final ruling as to who was in charge of the movement."[72]

Yassin was often referred to as the "spiritual leader" of Hamas. Khaled Hroub wrote of Yassin, "the calm and charismatic leader was until his death the most popular personality in the Gaza Strip." Yassin's assassination was an important event in the Israeli—Palestinian conflict. The attack sparked retaliation from Hamas, including one suicide bomber who wrote in his living will: "I shall avenge the death of my master, the martyr Sheikh Ahmed Yassin."

Israeli leaders understood that targeting Yassin was a calculated risk. According to Levitt:

> [T]he March 2004 assassination of Sheikh Yassin caused Israeli analysts particular concern because Yassin was one of the most vocal opponents to targeting Western interests among senior Hamas leaders….Without Yassin to restrain more globally oriented jihadists within Hamas, Israeli intelligence officials feared the Hamas response to Yassin's assassination might have included an attack on Jews or Israelis abroad.[73]

---

[72] Tamimi, *Hamas: A History from Within,* 197.

[73] Levitt, *Hamas*, 219.

Ahmed Qurei, the Palestinian Prime Minister, had similar concerns after Yassin's death: "Yassin is known for his moderation, and he was controlling Hamas, and therefore this is dangerous."[74]

Figure 2 displays Yassin's relative importance to Hamas, and how it fluctuated throughout his life. Ayyash's importance is also displayed to demonstrate his critical role in constructing bombs, in contrast to Yassin's primarily inspirational importance.
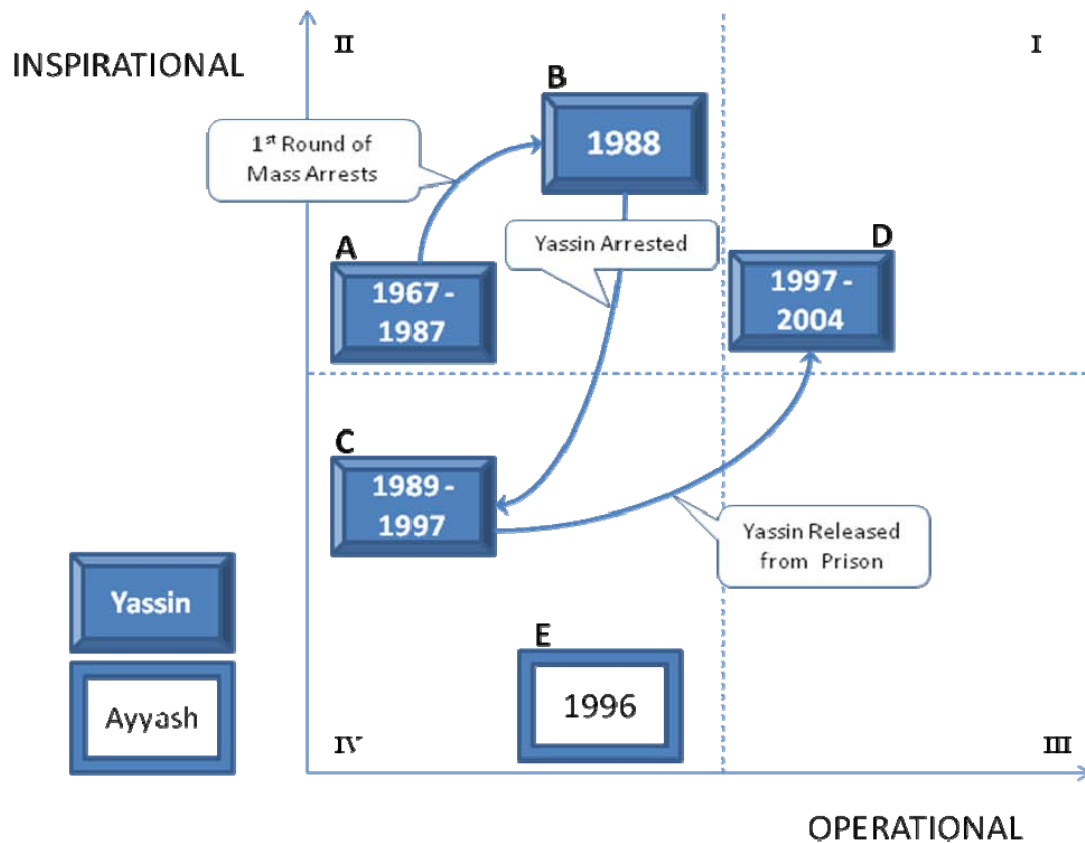

Figure 2.   Estimating Yassin's Influence (1967—2004)

---

74 James Bennet, "Leader of Hamas Killed by Missile in Israeli Strike," *New York Times,* 22 March 2004, online edition at www.nytimes.com.

7.   2004: Al-Rantissi Killed

Like Yassin, al-Rantissi was born in present-day Israel but moved to a refugee camp after the creation of the state in 1948. He became active with the Muslim Brotherhood while attending Alexandria University in Egypt. He co-founded both the Islamic Center in Gaza in 1973 and Hamas in 1987 with Yassin.

Al-Rantissi was a spokesman and political leader within Hamas but was also active in directly supervising terror attacks.[75] At the same time, the "[c]harismatic and articulate"[76] al-Rantissi was a lecturer at the Islamic University of Gaza. He was one of the more outspoken leaders of Hamas and was the first leaders of the organization to be arrested during the First Intifada. According to Zaki Chehab, al-Rantissi "would be the one rallying the troops following a setback to keep the movement motivated."[77]

Al-Rantissi rose to prominence during the exile of 415 Hamas and PIJ leaders to Lebanon in 1992. He led the deportees during their eight months in a refugee camp on the border. He oversaw the building of ties between West Bank and Gaza members of Hamas, as well as cross-factional ties with PIJ. Upon returning to Israel, al-Rantissi was arrested and stayed in an Israeli prison until 1997.

Like Yassin, al-Rantissi was a Quadrant I/II leader but his influence was less than Yassin's. He "held hardline views but never contradicted Yassin's more

---

[75] Levitt, *Hamas*, 39.

[76] Hroub, *Hamas: A Beginner's Guide,* 127.

[77] Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, 122-124.

moderate outlook."[78]   Al-Rantissi took over inside leadership of Hamas in 2004 after Yassin was killed by an Israeli airstrike. Less than one month later, he was killed by an Israeli helicopter attack. After the killings of Yassin and al—Rantissi in 2004, Hamas initially refused to name their successor.

E.   INTERNATIONAL ATTEMPTS TO USE DEMOCRACY AND ECONOMIC PRESSURE

Although Hamas has participated in terror acts, a strategy for dealing with Hamas must also consider the organization's social and religious programs, and therefore should utilize diplomatic and economic measures. Since the Hamas victory in 2006 elections, the West has attempted to use financial and diplomatic means to pressure Hamas to denounce violence and recognize Israel. To date, these efforts have been unsuccessful, and there is a great deal of disagreement on whether these strategies will work.

Economic isolation is one strategy the West is currently using in an attempt to restrict Hamas' funding. Prior to winning the election, the PA was expected to fulfill the needs of the people and failed. In contrast, nothing was expected of Hamas and its popularity grew because of what it did provide. This was despite the PA providing more services than Hamas; the critical difference was that the people expected more from the PA.

Now that Hamas is in control of Gaza, the burden of governance and taking care of the needs of the people is upon it. If it fails, its ideology will be dealt a serious

---

[78]   Hroub, *Hamas: A Beginner's Guide,* 127.

blow.   As stated earlier, the 2006 vote was primarily a protest vote against Fatah.   If Hamas struggles as Fatah did, the secular majority of Palestinians may again look for a new option.

The West is currently trying to bring this situation to pass by supporting the PA and isolating Hamas.   It will be impossible to cut off all funding to Hamas, but continued pressure may impact the social programs Hamas uses to maintain the support of the people.   At the same time, the West is supporting the PA in the West Bank.   If the PA — with foreign assistance — can reduce corruption and govern more effectively than Hamas in Gaza, we can expect Hamas support to be undermined.

Economic success in the West Bank could have a profound impact on Hamas supporters.   Jennifer Windsor writes, "Globalization has brought an unprecedented level of commercial and cultural penetration of societies, providing populations with ready proof of their comparatively poor economic and social status."[79]

Cutting off Hamas funding could have two main effects: reducing its ability to fund social programs and reducing payouts to the families of suicide bombers.   Sheikh Yassin stated in 2001 that Hamas pays out $2—3M monthly to the families of suicide bombers and imprisoned Hamas members.[80] Although financial motivations are usually secondary, Bill Keller reported in the *New York Times* that suicide bombings in Israel increased in March 2002 after Iraq increased the

---

[79]   Jennifer Windsor, Promoting Democratization Can Combat Terrorism, *The Washington Quarterly* 26:3 (2003): 45.

[80]   Levitt, *Hamas*, 59.

payment to families of suicide bombers from $10,000 to $25,000.[81] It is unclear how much the rise in bombings was due to the increased payout. However, the fact that payouts occurred at all suggests that Hamas and Iraq recognized they were a motivator at some level. According to Levitt, "[d]isrupting the Hamas dawa is the most effective way of weakening Hamas."[82]

Another strategy used by the Bush administration was to push democratization in the Middle East. Former Vice President Dick Cheney and National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice stated that resolution of the Israeli—Palestinian conflict would require democracy to be embraced by the Arab world.[83] Democracy in Palestine may seem to have backfired in 2006 when Hamas won the elections. However, if it is unable to govern effectively, this victory could undermine its popularity over the long term.

The literature is split on whether pushing democracy is an appropriate response to Islamic fundamentalism. Jennifer Windsor wrote that promoting democracy "can provide a set of values and alternatives that offer a powerful alternative to the appeal of…extremism."[84] Fathali Moghaddam agreed, stating "[t]he best long-term policy against terrorism is prevention, which is made possible by nourishing contextualized democracy on the ground floor."[85]

---

[81] Alan Krueger and Jitka Maleckova, "Does Poverty Cause Terrorism?" *The New Republic* (June 2002): 28.

[82] Levitt, *Hamas*, 230.

[83] Michael Bell, "The Israeli/Palestinian Conundrum: Is There a Way Out?" *Behind the Headlines* 61 (2004): 11.

[84] Windsor, "Promoting Democratization Can Combat Terrorism," 1.

[85] Fathali Moghaddam, "The Staircase to Terrorism" *American Psychologist* 60 (2005): 161.

On the other hand, Samuel Huntington wrote that "Western ideas of individualism, liberalism, constitutionalism, human rights, equality, liberty, the rule of law, democracy, free markets, the separation of church and state, often have little resonance in Islamic…cultures."[86] Anna Simons was more definitive in saying "democratizing the Middle East, were it possible, will not solve the problem. It might ameliorate it, but it might also make things worse."[87]

In my opinion, for democratization to work, it must not be forced upon Palestinians. Rather, economic pressure should be the means used to influence Hamas to moderate its views (or lead Palestinians to abandon Hamas). The West should focus efforts on improving economic conditions in the West Bank and aid the PA to reduce corruption and improve governance. If successful in improving conditions relative to Gaza, this approach could be a powerful influence on Palestinians.

Finally, economic measures and democratization will not be effective until several core issues are resolved. Diplomatic efforts must ultimately solve the right of return for Palestinians, the disposition of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, and the security concerns of Israel.

---

[86] Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign* Affairs 72 (1993): 40.

[87] Anna Simons, "Making Enemies: Part I" *The American* Interest 1 (2006): 8.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

IV. STATISTICAL ANALYSIS ON ISRAELI LEADERSHIP TARGETING

Many authors have written that killing terrorists will perpetuate a cycle of violence and eventually result in more terrorism. In 2004, Professor Ed Kaplan et al. published a study that attempted to objectively answer what affect Israeli leadership targeting had on suicide bombings. This section examines the first Kaplan study, as well as two subsequent studies, and draw conclusions based on their findings.

Professor Kaplan's first study examined all Israeli strikes against terrorists (not just Hamas), and did not distinguish the effects of targeting leaders versus that of targeting operatives. The study examined the period from 2001 through 2003, during which there were 85 successful suicide bombings.[88] As Kaplan et al. pointed out, the attacks were not evenly spread; there were thirteen attacks in March of 2002, but only seventeen in all of 2003. In addition to the 85 successful attacks, there were also thirty—five attacks that were stopped by Israeli security forces, for a total of 120 attempted attacks.

During the same period, Israel conducted seventy—five operations targeting terrorists, resulting in 119 terrorists killed.[89] However, 80 civilians were also killed in these attacks. Tragically, there were ten attacks that

[88] Edward Kaplan, Alex Mintz, Shaul Mishal and Claudio Samban, "What Happened to Suicide Bombings in Israel?" *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 28 (2005): 225-235.

[89] Information on Israeli targeted killing operations taken from B'tselem, the Israel Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, www.betselem.org.

resulted in thirty—one civilian deaths but that did not succeed in killing a single terrorist.[90]

The analysis found that targeted hits on terrorist leaders increased downstream terrorist attacks by increasing the number of terror recruits available for future attacks. However, when the Israelis conducted Operation Defensive Shield — a large—scale military operation in 2002 — the focus changed from killing to arresting terrorists. The study found that this shift in strategy resulted in the decline of suicide bombings in 2003. The authors concluded, "[t]his analysis suggests that preventive arrests, as opposed to the targeted killings of suspected terrorists, are responsible for the dramatic reduction in suicide bombings inside Israel since March 2002."[91]

There are many reasons to question the results of the study. The authors raised many of these issues themselves, including: a) the effect of targeting killings and arrests likely reverberates for a longer period than the study, b) the policy of targeted killing may have been more effective if done at a greater rate, and c) the study evaluates killing and capturing as independent outcomes, rather than part of an overall strategy of fighting terrorism.

In addition, capturing terrorists is not always practical. Israel uses targeted killings as a last resort. Prior to conducting an operation, intelligence must indicate an imminent attack. In addition, the Palestinian

---

[90] Kaplan et al., "What Happened to Suicide Bombings in Israel?" 227.

[91] Kaplan et al., "What Happened to Suicide Bombings in Israel?" 232.

Authority is given the opportunity to arrest the terrorist(s). If it does not, and the Israelis conclude that an arrest cannot be made, then a targeted killing may be used to prevent the terrorist attack.[92]

Kaplan et al. followed with a second study that contributes to our understanding of the capture versus killing debate by analyzing the effect of Israeli preparedness on the success rate of suicide bombing attempts. Once again, they concluded that targeted killing increases suicide bombing attacks and that arrests decrease future attacks. However, they find that the heightened alert status of Israeli security forces after a targeted killing results in more terrorists being caught attempting to retaliate.[93]

In 2007, a third study was done by Kaplan and Jacobson. This study, like the previous two, had weaknesses.[94] All three assumed a homogeneous group of terrorists. However, Hamas, PIJ and Fatah are not homogenous and responded in different ways. More importantly, these studies analyzed two strategies: killing vs. capturing terrorists. But they did not evaluate the impact of other important strategies including the Israeli—West Bank Barrier Wall, efforts to restrict Hamas funding, etc.

---

[92] Steven David, "Fatal Choices: Israel's Policy of Targeted Killing" *Ethics and International* Affairs (2003): 14.

[93] Ed Kaplan, Alex Mintz and Saul Mishal, "Tactical Prevention of Suicide Bombings in Israel," *Interfaces* 36, No. 5 (2006): 560.

[94] The authors acknowledge shortcomings within each study. They are clear on the assumptions made, and on the related gaps in the analysis.

The third study contained conclusions in conflict with the first two. Kaplan and Jacobsen used modeling and game theory to project future results and to overcome the weakness of the first two studies related to their fixed duration. They found that the lowest level of casualties occurred when the government is more patient than terrorists in responding to violence. In addition, there is an optimal level of operations against terrorists that is big enough to prevent large-scale terrorism, yet small enough to avoid provoking large-scale terrorist recruitment. Their analysis concluded that targeting killings "can be optimal for a civilian casualty—minimizing government, even when hits serve to recruit more terrorists."[95]

---

[95] Daniel Jacobson and Ed Kaplan, "Suicide Bombings and Targeted Killings in (Counter-) Terror Games," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 51, no. 5 (2007): 783.

V. CONCLUSION: HAVE ISRAELI ATTEMPTS TO TARGET HAMAS LEADERS BEEN AN EFFECTIVE COUNTERTERRORISM STRATEGY?

Under the right circumstances, leadership targeting has been effective in combating terrorism. Examples include the captures of Abimael Guzman and Shoko Asahara, and the resulting decline of Shining Path and Aum Shinrikyo. Israel's killing of Fathi Shiqaqi of the PIJ provides another example of effective leadership targeting more relevant to the Israeli—Palestinian conflict.

In contrast, Hamas has weathered blow after blow to its leadership throughout the years. Since 1988, Israel has conducted numerous mass arrests, dozens of targeted killings, and larger military incursions into the West Bank and Gaza. Although Hamas has suffered from these measures, the organization has been resilient from the start.

Hamas has survived in large part to the structure set up long before its inception on December 8, 1987. The Gaza branch of the Muslim Brotherhood — under the leadership of Sheikh Yassin — built a network of social and Islamic institutions that allowed Hamas to grow into a powerful force at inception. Armed with an established ideology, leadership depth, and extensive social programs, Hamas hit the ground running.

The following chart uses the Freeman Model to show the relative importance of several Hamas leaders who were targeted by Israel (Figure 3). It demonstrates that no leader has ever been important enough to Hamas for it to be vulnerable to a single decapitation strike.
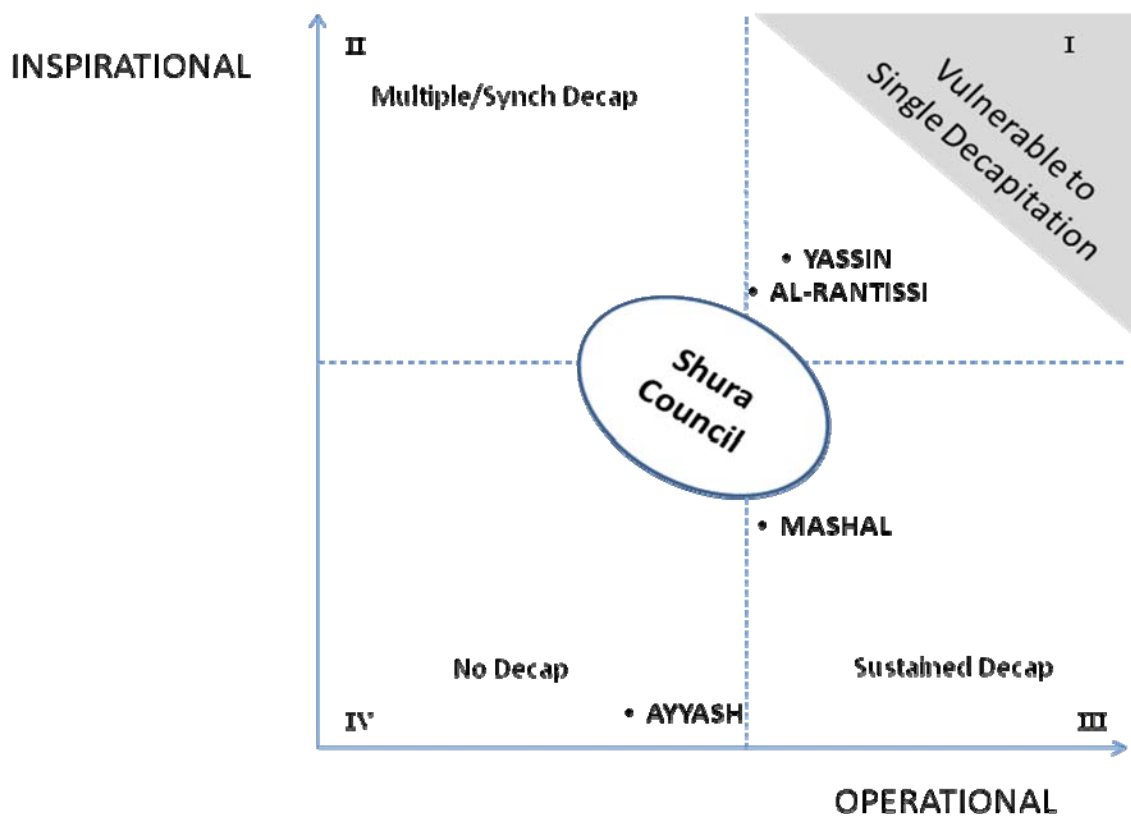
Figure 3.   Relative Importance of Hamas Leaders Targeted by
Israel

Hamas' leadership structure and depth compelled Israel
to use sustained and multiple and/or synchronous
decapitation strikes. Two rounds of mass arrests, the 1992
mass deportation, and the successful assassinations of
Ayyash, Yassin, and al—Rantissi have all impacted Hamas to
varying degrees.

However, after the mass arrests of 1988 and 1989,
Hamas created the outside leadership that enabled it to
survive every Israeli leadership strike and arrest.   The
organization became increasingly resilient until it

eventually became immune to decapitation. Meanwhile, Hamas grew in power, culminating in its 2006 election victory.

Although opinions on the effectiveness of Israel's counter-leadership targeting vary, many authors believe that Israel's efforts to target Hamas leaders have been effective. According to Amos Guiora,

> [T]argeted killing has eliminated a significant number of key operatives, thereby disrupting the terrorist organizations, and it has seemingly discouraged (deterred) potential terrorists from taking part in the suicide bomber infrastructure.[96]

In addition, Daniel Byman wrote that targeted killings combined with the border fence, military operations in Gaza and the West Bank, and other security measures have resulted in a precipitous drop in attacks.[97] Steven R. David agreed that Israel should continue to target terror leaders despite the chance that "targeted killing has not appreciably diminished the costs of terrorist attacks and may have even increased them."[98] He pointed to successful examples of Israel targeting terror leaders, including the 1995 operation that killed Fathi Shiqaqi. In the aftermath, the organization "limped along for several years, unable to mount any serious attacks against Israeli interests."[99] Although Ayyash's killing provoked four

---

[96] Amos Guiora, "Targeted Killing as Active Self-Defense," *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law* 36 (2004): 319.

[97] Daniel Byman, "Do Targeted Killings Work?" *Foreign* Affairs (2006): 96.

[98] David, "Fatal Choices," 6.

[99] David, "Fatal Choices," 4.

retaliatory bombings, subsequent bombings were much less effective because other Hamas bomb makers lacked Ayyash's expertise.[100]

Another example of effective leadership targeting occurred during the Second Intifada. Israel stepped up its practice of arresting leaders and conducted Operation Defensive Shield (ODS) in 2002. ODS was a major military operation that included strict curfews, placing Yassar Arafat's Ramallah compound under siege, and the detention of over 4,000 Palestinians.[101] Subsequently, the effectiveness of Hamas suicide operations fell substantially. According to the Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism, deaths per Hamas attack fell from 5.4 in 2002 to 0.11 in 2005. In addition, the rate of attacks fell dramatically.

On the other hand, Zakhi Chehab writes that the "assassination of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin did not seriously damage the power of Hamas' internal leadership."[102] Further, in an International Crisis Group (ICG) interview, an Israeli intelligence officer recognizes the "astounding rapidity with which Hamas fills vacant leadership positions."[103]

The same ICG report points out that "Israel and U.S. security forces believe targeted assassinations…[restrain] Hamas and contribute to Hamas' less hard—line comments." Ultimately, the ICG concludes by stating that "Hamas today

---

[100]   "Yahya Ayyash," www.wikipedia.org.

[101]   "Operation Defensive Shield," www.wikipedia.org.

[102]   Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, 121.

[103]   International Crisis Group, "Dealing with Hamas," 20.

is politically stronger if operationally weaker" as a result of Israeli leadership attacks.

The combination of counterterrorism methods used by Israel makes it difficult to attribute success to a single method. Given that most Hamas leaders are in Quadrant IV of the Freeman model, it is important that Israel employ a broad approach — including targeted killings — in order to effectively disrupt Hamas.

This case study demonstrates that once a terror group reaches Quadrant IV, the state must engage in a high tempo of attacks. The pace of attacks must be high enough to outstrip the terrorists' ability to replenish their resources. This tempo is only possible with great intelligence and the ability to rapidly respond to information on terrorist location. Thus, this tactic may only be effective in a situation similar to the Israeli—Palestinian conflict: shared border, small geographic area, etc.

Prior to his assassination by Israel, Hamas co—founder al—Rantissi admitted that the targeting killings by Israel hampered Hamas. Further evidence that the policy worked came when Hamas did not retaliate for al-Rantissi's death. Khaled Hroub wrote, "[o]n the ground, there is no question that Hamas has been seriously weakened by the decimation of its ranks through assassination and arrest."[104]

In conclusion, targeting Hamas leaders has been an effective counterterrorism strategy. Although Hamas has been immune to leadership decapitation from the start,

---

[104] Byman, "Do Targeted Killings Work?," 105.

Israeli operations have deprived Hamas of key inspirational and operational leaders. As predicted by the Freeman model, it required a sustained tempo of multiple synchronous operations due to the communal and decentralized nature of Hamas' leadership. The method (kill vs. capture) Israel used has been critical, as Israel paid a political price due to civilian casualties, and Hamas was bolstered by them. Ultimately, Israel relied on a combination of measures to supplement leadership targeting, including armed incursions into Gaza and the West Bank, and the construction of the security wall.

LIST OF REFERENCES

Abdou-Enein, Youssef. "Hamas: A Further Exploration of Jihadist Tactics," *Strategic Insights IV* (2005). Available at Center of Contemporary Conflict, www.ccc.nps.navy.mil.

Bell, Michael. "The Israeli/Palestinian Conundrum: Is There a Way Out?" *Behind the Headlines* 61 (2004): 1—21.

Bennet, James. "Leader of Hamas killed by Missile in Israeli Strike," *New York Times,* 22 March 2004. Online edition, www.nytimes.com.

Brafman, Ori and Rod Beckstrom. *The Starfish and the Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations.* New York: Portfolio, 2006.

Byman, Daniel. "Do Targeted Killings Work?" *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2006.

Chehab, Zaki. *Inside Hamas*. New York: Nation Books, 2007.

David, Steven R. "Fatal Choices: Israel's Policy of Targeted Killing." *Ethics and International Affairs*, April, 2003.

Enderlin, Charles. "Understanding the Factional Violence in Palestine." Speech given in Washington, D.C. (June 2006). Available at www.mideast1.org.

Freeman, Michael. "Leadership Targeting of Terrorist Groups: A Strategic Assessment." Unpublished, Naval Postgraduate School.

Guiora, Amos. "Targeted Killing as Active Self—Defense," *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law* 36 (2004): 319.

Hoffer, Eric. *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements.* New York: Harper and Row, 1951.

Hroub, Khaled. *Hamas: A Beginner's Guide.* London: Pluto Press, 2006.

Huntington, Samuel P. "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1993): 22–50.

Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center for Special Studies. "Profile of the Hamas Movement." Available at http://intelligence.org.il.

International Crisis Group Report 21 (2004), "Dealing with Hamas." Available at www.crisisgroup.org.

The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, "The Mass Deportation of 1992." Available at www.btselem.org.

Jacobson, Daniel, and Edward Kaplan. "Suicide Bombings and Targeted Killings in (Counter–) Terror Games." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 51, no. 5 (2007): 772–792.

Kaplan, Edward H., Alex Mintz, Shaul Mishal, and Claudio Samban. "What Happened to Suicide Bombings in Israel? Insights from a Terror Stock Model." *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 28 (2005): 225–235.

———. "Tactical Prevention of Suicide Bombings in Israel." *Interfaces* 36, no. 6 (2006): 553–561.

Kreuger, Alan, and Jitka Maelckova. "Does Poverty Cause Terrorism?" *The New Republic* (2002): 27–33.

Levitt, Matthew. *Hamas: Politics, Charity, and Terrorism in the Service of Jihad.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006.

Mishal, Shaul, and Avraham Sela. *The Palestinian Hamas.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2006.

Moghaddam, Fathali M. "The Staircase to Terrorism," *American Psychologist* 60, no. 2 (2005), 161–169.

Simons, Anna. "Making Enemies: An Anthropology of Islamist Terror," *The American Interest* 1, no. 4 (2006): 6–18.

———. "Making Enemies: Part II," *The American Interest* 2, no. 1 (2006): 35–45.

Tamimi, Azzam. *Hamas: A History from Within.* Northampton: Olive Branch Press, 2007.

Windsor, Jennifer L. "Promoting Democratization Can Combat
    Terrorism." *The Washington Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (2003):
    43—58.

Wyne, Ali. "Suicide Terrorism as Strategy: Case Studies of
    Hamas and the Kurdistan Workers Party." *Strategic
    Insights* IV, no. 7 (2005). Center for Contemporary
    Conflict, www.ccc.nps.navy.mil.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST

1. Defense Technical Information Center
   Ft. Belvoir, VA

2. Dudley Knox Library
   Naval Postgraduate School
   Monterey, CA

3. Joint Special Operations University
   MacDill Air Force Base
   Tampa, FL

4. Garry Reid
   ASD/SOLIC
   Washington, DC

5. United States Special Operations Command, J—7
   MacDill Air Force Base
   Tampa, FL

6. United States Special Operation Command, Librarian
   MacDill Air Force Base
   Tampa, FL